

February 8, 2002

OFFICE OF RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT LETTER

**SOLICITATION OF APPLICATIONS FOR THE
RESEARCH ENHANCEMENT AWARD PROGRAM**

1. The Veterans Health Administration (VHA) Medical Research Service (MRS) announces the opportunity for Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) medical centers to compete for support by the Research Enhancement Award Program (REAP).

2. The purpose of the REAP awards is to promote and support groups of VA investigators in programs of exceptional quality that address specific medical problems through fundamental, translational, and/or clinical research. Hereafter, the group of investigators is referred to as a "Program." Each Program must revolve around a medical problem of importance to the veteran population. Areas of interest include, but are not limited to:

- a. Diabetes;
- b. Chronic Human Viral Diseases;
- c. Lymphomas and Leukemia;
- d. Fundamental mechanisms of vaccine development;
- e. Diagnosis, prevention, or treatment for potentially fatal airborne pathogens or toxins;
- f. Schizophrenia;
- g. Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis and related neurodegenerative disorders;
- h. Brain tumors; and
- i. Stroke.

NOTE: *Applications for REAP awards in other focus areas will be accepted, however, all REAPs must be distinct in research focus from other REAPs and/or ongoing centers including GRECCs, MIRECCs, PADRECCs etc. at the applying VA medical center. A VA medical center may have up to three MRS supported REAPs and/or centers, but may not submit more than two REAP applications for this round. The Principal Investigator (PI) on a REAP application may not be the PI or Co-PI in any other ongoing REAP or center.*

3. Recipients of REAP awards are expected to participate in training new investigators and to pursue new avenues for solving medical problems. REAP awards may support core laboratories or facilities for the benefit of multiple investigators within the Program. Multidisciplinary

Programs that incorporate multiple research components must clearly demonstrate that each component relates to the research focus of the REAP. Activities supported by REAP are to be performed in VA facilities unless specific approval of an exception is obtained in advance of submission.

4. Investigators in a Program are to be conducting research in a related medical area or scientific discipline. If an investigator's research has been primarily focused on other diseases, disorders, or processes, the nature of the contribution to research in the REAP focus area must be clearly defined. To qualify for application, there must be at least four VA investigators. Investigators from the following categories are considered qualified:

- a. VA Merit Review funded (or Health services Research (HSR) or Rehabilitation Research and Development (RR&D) equivalent) at the time of application submission,
- b. VA Research Career Scientist receiving VA salary and National Institute of Health (NIH) grant support, or
- c. VA Career Development awardee at the Advanced Research Career Development (ARCD) level.

NOTE: *These investigators are referred to as the qualifying investigators. Investigators who do not meet the criteria in subparagraphs 4a through 4c are not eligible for consideration as qualifying investigators. In addition to qualifying investigators, VA investigators with research support other than Merit Review may be included if they contribute to and strengthen the Program.*

5. One of the major REAP goals is the training of new investigators. The application must demonstrate the prior success of qualifying investigators in training pre- and post-doctoral fellows and junior investigators, and outline ongoing and future plans for recruiting and training new investigators.

6. New and innovative research ideas need to be explored as pilot projects to acquire data supporting the validity and feasibility of the ideas. The benefit of a Program is that it contains a critical mass of investigators to work collaboratively to generate new and novel approaches to medical problems. Carefully conceived pilot projects are encouraged to explore the next generation of solutions to medical problems at the fundamental, translational, and/or clinical levels. The pilot studies are vehicles to demonstrate collaboration of qualifying investigators, supporting investigators, and trainees. Pilot studies submitted by non-collaborating individual investigators are not appropriate.

7. The VA medical center and the Veterans Integrated Services Network (VISN) must support the REAP application, and agree to provide 25 percent time for the REAP Director to coordinate Program activities.

8. Support may be requested for recurring costs up to \$250,000 per year. Funds for recurring costs may be requested for:

- a. Associate Investigator (AI) trainees;
- b. Technical personnel to maintain core laboratory functions;
- c. Supplies for core laboratories;
- d. Pilot projects or current project enhancement; and
- e. Other miscellaneous expenses.

NOTE: *Funds for AI trainees may be included in the budget, but will not be distributed until an AI applicant has been approved by MRS (see VHA Handbook 1201.2).*

9. In addition to recurring costs, up to \$250,000 may be requested for specialized shared equipment or to improve infrastructure for a specialized shared facility, e.g., Benches and/or cabinets following renovation. Equipment requests must be well justified and must include documentation of in-kind partnering and/or direct contributions by the VA medical center, VISN, affiliated institution, or other sources. In-kind partnering may include, but is not limited to, the cost of minor renovation to allow installation of equipment, or the costs for technical personnel to oversee use of the equipment or facility.

NOTE: *See VHA Handbook 1200.1. In-kind partnering and/or direct contributions from other sources needs to exceed the 25 percent minimum, with 50 percent match recommended for REAP applications. Specialized shared equipment requested as part of the REAP must be evaluated by the REAP review panel.*

10. Up to six REAPs may be awarded with funding for up to 5 years beginning October 1, 2002. If the number of qualifying investigators falls below three for more than one Merit Review cycle, the Program will be reviewed and subject to probation or termination.

11. A VA medical center may have up to three MRS supported REAPs and/or Centers, but may not submit more than two REAP applications for this round. REAPs must be distinct in research focus from other REAPs and/or ongoing centers including GRECCs, MIRECCs, PADRECCs etc. at the applying VA medical center. The Principal Investigator (PI) on a REAP application may not be the PI or Co-PI in any other ongoing REAP or MRS supported center.

12. REAP applications will be evaluated on the basis of the following major components:

- a. Compliance with eligibility criteria;
- b. Focus of the Program on a medical problem of importance to the veteran population;
- c. Scientific experience of the qualifying investigators;
- d. Level of past, ongoing and planned collaboration among the qualifying investigators;

- e. Evidence of a background in training new investigators and the strength of the plan for continued and expanded training;
- f. Plans to develop new and innovative research programs as evidenced by the pilot projects;
- g. Relevance of core activities to the pilot projects and proposed program;
- h. Plans to integrate multiple basic research approaches or a combination of basic, clinical and translational approaches, where appropriate;
- i. Appropriateness of the budget and ability to administer the funds; and
- j. Commitment to the Program by the VA medical center, VISN, and affiliated institution.

13. Each Program is required to submit to VHA Central Office an annual research performance report. Performance measures include:

- a. Importance of major research findings from the Program;
- b. Productivity measured by number of manuscripts accepted for publication in leading Journals;
- c. Peer-reviewed funding of investigators, including comparison with pre-REAP funding levels;
- d. Status of the training program;
- e. Status of pilot projects including new, ongoing, and concluded;
- f. Evidence of local, national, and international recognition of the Program and/or its members; and
- g. Recommendations and/or report from the External Advisory Committee.

NOTE: *Unsatisfactory performance will result in probationary status or termination of funding.*

14. Written notification of intent to submit an application needs to be received in Medical Research Service (121E) by March 15, 2002. Applications will not be reviewed without this notification. The following information needs to be provided on one page, and sent via FAX to Dennis Przywara, Ph.D. at 202-275-6100.

- a. Name of the VA medical center;
- b. The primary broad focus area of the REAP;
- c. Application title;

- d. Name of PI;
- e. Names of other qualifying investigators;
- f. A brief paragraph describing the focus and approaches of the proposal; and
- g. Signature of the Associate Chief of Staff, Research & Development.

15. Deadline for receipt of applications is May 1, 2002. Proposals will be reviewed in late summer, and results announced by October 1, 2002.

16. Inquiries may be directed to Dennis A. Przywara, Ph.D. at (202) 408-3600, or email dennis.przywara@hq.med.va.gov.

S/ John R. Feussner, M.D., M.P.H.
Chief Research and Development Officer

Attachments

DISTRIBUTION: CO: E-mailed 2/08/2002
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ATTACHMENT A

INSTRUCTIONS FOR APPLICATIONS

1. Submit the original application plus twelve copies of the application duplicated on 8.5 x 11 inch white paper (see instructions for preparation of Medical Research Service Merit Review applications, M-3, Pt. II, Ch. 4). Except for the original, which must be duplicated face only; all forms and narrative material must be duplicated back-to-back. Use a blank sheet of paper as a continuation sheet for the forms where necessary. Veterans Health Administration (VHA) Central Office will use the original as the master file copy. Type material single-spaced, leaving a 1 inch margin at each edge of each sheet. Do not submit applications prepared from a dot matrix printer or using small fonts, and do not use photoreduction. Type the name of the Principal Investigator (PI) in the lower right portion of each numbered page.
2. The application must be complete and comprehensive as submitted. Applications will be considered incomplete and returned if they are illegible, fail to follow instructions, or if the material presented is insufficient to permit an adequate review. Research Enhancement Award Program (REAP) applications must conform to a standardized format as outlined so that each application contains all of the pertinent information. This is critical to a comparative review of the applications. If an area must be discussed and does not fit logically into the titles provided below, add this information as an Appendix. Limit the narrative to twenty pages (see Roman numerals I-VIII). Do not submit copies of funded or pending research applications of investigators. Each qualifying investigator may submit up to two reprints representing their most important work. Submit six collated sets of reprints.
3. The first pages of the application should be Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Form 10-1313-1, Merit Review Application, and VA Form 10-1313-2, Summary Description of Program, followed by a Table of Contents with page numbers. Use the following designated roman numerals and headings:
 - I. Background on the program.
 - II. Research focus.
 - III. Personnel.
 - IV. Coordination of activities.
 - V. Resources.
 - VI. Training.
 - VII. Advantages of a REAP Award to the VA medical center.
 - VIII. New initiatives (pilot projects).
 - X. Letters of endorsement and support.

XI. Budget. VA Forms 10-1313-3, Current Funds and First Year Request for Program, and VA Form 10-1313-4, Estimated Expenses of Program.

XI. Appendices. Under Appendices, list the following:

A. VA Form 10-1313-5, Investigator's Biographic Sketch, and VA Form 10-1313-6, Investigator's Bibliography, for each investigator.

B. VA Form 10-1313-5, Investigator's Total VA and Non-VA Research Support, and VA form 10-1313-8, Summary Statement, Abstract and Budget Summary, for each funded proposal for each qualifying investigator.

C. Approvals. Human, animal, and/or biosafety approvals for pilot projects, if relevant.

D. Other relevant information.

4. **I. Background on the Program**. Address the history and background of your group and its interaction with your VA medical center and affiliated university in the area of the proposed Program.

5. **II. Research Focus**. Describe the research focus and goals of the Program. The central unifying theme of the Program needs to be derived from the expertise and direction of the currently funded research and plans for future funded research. Describe the current status of, and future plans for, integration of basic, translational and clinical components of the Program.

6. **III. Personnel**. List the name, academic title, VA title, and VA employment status (8ths) for each qualifying investigator. List the qualifying Merit Review or National Institute of Health (NIH) (*NOTE: Research Career Scientists only*) grant title, inclusive dates, and total dollars for each investigator. List the source, title, total amount, and inclusive dates for all other active and pending funding for each qualifying investigator. List other VA investigators who will participate in the Program, and provide academic and funding information. Clearly identify the qualifying investigators.

7. **IV. Coordination of Activities**. Describe the composition and functions of the internal executive or steering committee. Identify the individual who will be responsible for coordination of Program activities. Describe how the activities will be coordinated, including how decisions will be made to initiate or terminate pilot projects and how trainees will be selected. Identify the individual responsible for administration of the funds, and describe how the funds will be administered. Describe the composition and functions of the external advisory committee.

8. **V. Resources**. Describe the research facilities available, both within the VA medical center and through affiliated institutions. Distinguish between those resources that are currently in place, and those resources that must be added to fulfill the Program mission. Describe the role of the Program in supporting the individual funded research listed in paragraph 6. If support for a core facility is requested, explain how a specialized core laboratory strengthens the research of the Program and how the core activity supports the pilot projects. Describe the population of patients if there is a clinical component to the Program.

9. **VI. Training.** List the names of current and past trainees supervised by each Program investigator. Identify the source of funds to support each trainee, duration of training, and current positions held by past trainees. Also list all past, current, and submitted Career Development and Merit Review Entry Program (MREP) applicants for whom the Program investigators are mentors. Describe plans for recruitment and funding of future research trainees. Describe in detail the training program that is, or will be, in place to provide a successful training experience, including formal course work, seminars, data sessions, and plans for monitoring progress. Trainees should be supported at least in part by VA funds. Describe the potential pathway for a VA career for each proposed trainee. If funds to support trainees are not requested, explain how trainees will be encouraged to pursue a research career within the VA.

10. **VII. Advantages of a REAP Award to the VA Medical Center.** REAP awards are intended to provide an added dimension to a VA medical center's research activities. This includes capability and potential for a net accomplishment greater than that possible by the support of individual components alone. An explanation of how this expectation will be met is critical to the establishment of the Program. Describe the special advantages of having this Program at your VA medical centers. Describe the anticipated impact, if any, of this Program on the clinical care of the patients in your VA medical centers.

11. **VIII. New Initiatives (Pilot Projects).** Describe plans to develop new and innovative projects to enhance and extend the current research activity. Collaborations among qualifying investigators are essential and inclusion of supporting investigators is permissible. The pilot projects should be used as a vehicle for training as well as for the exploration and development of innovative ideas. Limit the description of each project to three pages, and submit in the following format:

a. **Name(s) of Investigator(s).**

b. **Title of Proposed Project.**

c. **Background.** Indicate the scientific basis (rationale) for the research and its relationship to other major research findings. Describe the significance of the research, and its relevance to the mission of VA.

d. **Research Objectives.** Outline precisely and clearly the goals of the planned project, including the hypothesis to be tested and the specific objectives of the project.

e. **Project Design and Methods.** Briefly define and describe the approach to the research.

f. **References.**

12. **IX. Letters of Endorsement and Support.** Include letters of endorsement from the medical center Director and Veterans Integrated Services Network (VISN) Director, that includes a statement agreeing to provide 25 percent protected time to the coordinator of the Program. Include a letter of endorsement from the Research and Development Committee.

Letters of support from the affiliated institution and relevant department chairperson(s) are optional, but helpful.

13. **X. Budget.** Use VA Form 10-1313-3 and VA Form 10-1313-4 to summarize and justify the requested budget. Include a separate VA Form 10-1313-3 and VA Form 10-1313-4 for each pilot project. Request only resources and facilities directly identified with the Program. Allowable categories are as follows:

- a. Personnel cost for essential technical staff to maintain core or shared facilities.

***NOTE:** Costs for staff supported by individual research awards are not allowed.*

- b. Salary for Associate Investigator trainee(s) (M.D. or Ph.D.).

c. Specialized shared or core equipment. If a major or specialized equipment item is facility requested, justify thoroughly and include documentation of in-kind partnering and/or direct contributions by the VA medical center, affiliated institution, or other sources.

***NOTE:** See VHA handbook 1202.1. In-kind partnering and/or direct contributions needs to exceed the 25 percent minimum, with 50 percent match advised for REAP applications.*

- d. Supplies and operating costs for core laboratories.

- e. Expenses for pilot projects.

- f. Program infrastructure support, such as maintenance contracts on core equipment.

- g. Travel for trainees to attend scientific meetings limited to \$3,000 per year.

- h. Other miscellaneous expenses.

14. **XI. Appendices**

a. **Appendix A.** Include VA Forms 10-1313-5 and VA Form 10-1313-6 for each qualifying investigator, followed by the same forms for other participating investigators. Limit the bibliography to two pages for each investigator.

b. **Appendix B.** Include VA Form 10-1313-8, for each qualifying investigator. Include VA Form 10-1313a, Merit Review Board Summary Statement, or other funding agency front sheet, abstract and budget summary for each Federal and non-Federal funded proposal for each qualifying investigator.

c. **Appendix C.** Include human, animal, and/or biosafety approvals for pilot projects, if relevant. Refer to guidelines for Merit Review preparation in M-3, Part II, Chapter 4.

- d. **Appendix D.** Include other relevant information.

15. **Application Submission** The application must be sent through the medical center Research and Development Office, the Research and Development Committee, the medical center Director, and other appropriate channels for transmittal to VHA Central Office.

a. **Submit to VHA Central Office:**

- (1) The original application,
- (2) Twelve copies of the application, and
- (3) Six collated sets of reprints (two reprints per investigator).

b. **Packages delivered by Federal Express or other door-to-door delivery services should be sent to:**

Department of Veterans Affairs
Medical Research Service (121E)
Attn: REAP
1400 Eye Street NW, Suite 400
Washington, DC 20005

c. **All other mail should be sent to:**

VHA Central Office
Medical Research Service (121E)
Attn: REAP
810 Vermont Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20420

ATTACHMENT B

**SAMPLE FORMAT OF CHECKLIST FOR APPLICATIONS FOR
RESEARCH ENHANCEMENT AWARD PROGRAMS**

- _____ 1. Front sheet Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Form 10-1313A, Merit Review Application, signed by the Associate Chief of Staff Research and Principal Investigator (PI).
- _____ 2. Abstract of the application, i.e., VA Form 10-1313-2, Summary Description of Program.
- _____ 3. Table of Contents with page numbers.
- _____ 4. Narrative. A maximum 20 pages containing items I-VIII.
- _____ 5. Letters of Endorsement from the medical center Director and Veterans Integrated Service Network (VISN) Director
- _____ 6. Letter of Endorsement from the Research and Development (R&D) Committee.
- _____ 7. Other letters of support.
- _____ 8. First year budget for the program; use VA Form 10-1313-3, Current Funds and First Year Request for Program
- _____ 9. Budget summary and justification; use VA Form 10-1313-4, Estimated Expenses of Program.
- _____ 10. Documentation of support from VA medical center, VISN and/or affiliated institution for major equipment or facilities.
- _____ 11. Budget for each pilot project; use VA Forms 10-1313-3 and VA Form 10-1313-4.
- _____ 12. Send a VA Form 10-1313-5, Investigator's Biographic Sketch, and a VA Form 10-1313-6, Investigator's Bibliography for each participating investigator. **NOTE:** *Limit the bibliography to two pages per investigator.*
- _____ 13. Summary statement, abstract and budget for each federal and non-federal funded proposal for each qualifying investigator. **NOTE:** *Identify the investigator on each abstract.*
- _____ 14. Human use, animal use, and biosafety approvals for pilot projects, if relevant.
- _____ 15. Original application.
- _____ 16. Twelve copies of the application.
- _____ 17. Six collated sets of reprints (two reprints for each investigator).